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AUTHOR	Martin, Sherri Anna
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ABSTRACT

Early intervention programs provide a significant opportunity for high risk students to secure the available resources, funding, educational background, and guidance to enter postsecondary education. Beginning as early as kindergarten and throughout high school, encouraging students to enter college and receive a baccalaureate degree gives high risk students the much needed support and extra attention they need. Many high risk students need this help to attend and graduate from college. Using early intervention strategies eliminates the boundaries between schools and colleges, discourages student dropout, and gives students hope to pursue entrance into college. Active participation by school counselors, teachers, school and college administrators, college student support staff, and faculty generates involvement between schools and colleges and also eases the transition from one institution to another. (JM)

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Early Intervention Program and College Partnerships
Sherri Anna Martin

Early intervention partnerships with colleges provide a significant opportunity for "at-risk" students to have the available resources, funding, curriculum, and guidance to enter postsecondary education. Beginning as early as kindergarten and progressing through high school, encouragement for students to enter college and receive a baccalaureate degree gives "at-risk" students the much needed support and extra attention they need. Many "at-risk" students need this help to successfully apply, attend, and graduate from college. Using early intervention strategies: (1) eliminates the boundaries between schools and colleges, (2) discourages student drop-out, and (3) gives students hope to pursue entrance into college. Active participation by school counselors, teachers, school and college administrators, college student support staff, and faculty generates involvement between schools and colleges but also eases the transitions from one institution to another.

AT-RISK STUDENTS

The term "at-risk" or "high-risk" students are used to define those students whose probability of withdrawal from college is above average (Jones & Watson, 1990). These students, mostly found among the underrepresented in higher education, rate of attrition is disproportionately higher than the general student population. Therefore, colleges and universities make special efforts to identify and monitor the admission of these students. Once admitted, many institutions provide special student support services and programs in an attempt to retain these students and increase their graduation rates. Financially, institutions monitor the enrollment of "at-risk" students partly because the high rates of noncompletion and declines in student population have a direct effect on the increasing average cost per student (Jones & Watson, 1990). Demographic characteristics of groups that have been targeted as high-risk by higher education institutions and scholars have included: racial and ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged, persons with disabilities, first generation to attend college, international students, women (in traditional male fields), non-traditional age students, athletes, and transfer students.

TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Private: Early intervention programs were first established by philanthropists and private entities. A Better Chance was created in 1964 by 23 independent schools to focus on improving the enrollment of minority high school students in academically challenging public and private schools across the United States (Fenske et al, 1997). One of the most successful private programs, established by Eugene Lang in 1981, is the I Have A Dream Foundation (IHAD) which has been established in 63 cities, serving over 13,000 students. IHAD programs are designed to provide academic support, mentors, guidance counseling, and financial assistance for students to graduate from high school and pursue employment or higher education. In addition to A Better Chance and the I Have A Dream Foundation, many other foundations community groups, businesses, professional, civic and service organizations are also actively involved in the coordination, planning and funding of early intervention programs.

Federal, State and Local Government Collaborations: Congress established the National Early Intervention Scholarship Program (NEISP) as part of the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that provides funding to states for early intervention programs which specifically target low-income students. In order for students to receive financial assistance, students must participate in student support services, which include: tutoring, mentoring, summer programs, academic advising and development, and student employment. The 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act established the GEAR-UP program which will retain most of the components of NEISP, and in addition, will seek to provide services for lower income students as early as the 6th grade.

School College Collaborations: University-school outreach partnerships provide important opportunities where staff, faculty, and administrators of all institutions benefit by sharing resources and working together to increase the participation of at-risk students in higher education. An effort to provide outreach services between the kindergarten, grade school, high school, and college that are continued throughout the student's academic progression allows for encouragement to pursue a college degree at every level of educational attainment. An example is the Brainpower Connection, an ongoing partnership between staff at Incarnate Wood College (San Antonio, TX) and the local high school, grade school, and kindergarten within the same community. This project is designed to provide support and encouragement for students (many who will be first generation college students) to complete high school and enter higher education (Rose, 1993).

College and University Supported Programs: Once "at-risk" students enter college it is important that they participate in student support services. There are several characteristics of successful student support services for "at-risk" students: (1) a freshman year experience, (2) academic support, (3) student service contacts, (4) recruitment activities and incentives for participation, (5) dedicated staff and directors, and (6) an important role on campus (Muraskin, 1997). College and universities sponsor early intervention programs with many different initiatives and goals for "at-risk" students, including: (1) increasing the high school graduation rates and college attendance, (2) increasing the retention rates of these students at their own institutions, (3) preparing students to pursue particular academic majors and careers, and (4) encouraging students to attend their institution (Perna, et al, 1998).

WHY ARE EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS IMPORTANT FOR MINORITIES?

Early intervention programs have played a very important and significant role in providing services particulary for minority youth. As the participation rates of African-American and Latino students continue to increase, the services that will guide them towards successful entrance and transition to college life will be key determinants on student retention. Although there is a

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significant increase in the higher education of minorities, this group is predominately concentrated at community colleges with few transferring into four-year institutions (Brewer, 1990). Also, most minority students (83.7 percent) are still enrolled in lower-cost and public institutions (Wilds & Wilson, 1998). Early intervention programs can provide college preparation for more African American, Latino, Asian and Native American students to meet the criteria of the more selective public flagship and private institutions. These initiatives can also decrease the gaps between the participation of Whites and minorities and address the lack of representation of minorities in certain career fields, including mathematics and science.

Early intervention programs are a key element of providing a solid framework to increase the retention of first-generation, low income minority students. African American and Latino students are less likely to graduate from college and complete a four year degree in comparison to White students, especially at predominately White institutions (Wilds & Wilson, 1998; Brewer, 1990). Therefore, the concern for students of color in higher education does not stop with access into the institution but continues with providing the resources to retain these students. By implementing on-going educational programs and student support services at postsecondary institutions, minority student concerns and issues in higher education are addressed at an early stage of college student development.

PROVIDING AN EARLY START

Efforts to provide early college intervention programs initially targeted minority, low income high school juniors and seniors. Presently, more programs are being established for students at a younger age (including elementary and middle school). Many of these students will be first generation college students and will need preparation and information about higher education.

If the emphasis on attending college starts in grade school, students and families have more time to prepare to attend college. Students whose parents attended college may already have the support and guidance from home. Students from higher economic backgrounds also have the resources available, such as: test preparation courses, private schooling, summer college enrichment programs, and independent educational consultants. However, many "at-risk" students have to rely on their schools or outreach programs to prepare them for post-secondary education. For over three decades, Federal TRIO programs have provided opportunities for "at-risk" groups from pre-college level to post-graduate study.

FEDERAL TRIO PROGRAMS

Funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, TRIO programs have been dedicated to assisting low income, first generation students to overcome class and social barriers for successful entrance and graduation from college. Two-thirds of the participants represent both: (1) first generation college students and (2) students from lower income families (one-third of participants are from either group). Over 2,300 TRIO projects provided services to 740,550 students in 1999.

Talent Search provides academic support, admissions counseling, financial aid and scholarship assistance for students in grades six through twelve.

Upward Bound students receive intensive college preparation through advising, counseling, instruction and tutoring on college campuses in after-school and summer programs. They also participate in college admissions activities and workshops.

Upward Bound Math and Science students focus on computer technology, science and math in preparation for college entrance and majors in those areas.

Veterans Upward Bound programs provide basic study skills and developmental courses for military veterans to prepare for higher education. Referrals are made to other services which provide veterans support including the Veterans Administration, veteran associations and state and local government agencies.

Student Support Services provides tutoring, advising, developmental instruction and other student services to students who are currently attending college until they earn their baccalaureate degrees.

Educational Opportunity Centers helps adults, including displaced or under-employed workers, select and apply for postsecondary education and financial aid.

Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement programs encourages low income students and minority undergraduates to pursue a career in college teaching by providing faculty mentors and research opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Today, several early intervention programs are coordinated and funded by colleges and universities, community groups, businesses, and other organizations that are committed to providing opportunity and access of underrepresented and disadvantaged citizens into higher education. The assistance of government (federal, state and local) in providing funding, mentor opportunities, employment for students, and other resources has also been very instrumental in efforts to provide outreach to "at-risk" students (Fenske, et. al., 1997). These programs have a direct effect on the improvement of high school performance and completion. Early intervention programs, in helping students prepare for the competitive college admissions process, have also encouraged and provided the resources for "at-risk" students to complete high school successfully (Rose, 1993).

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